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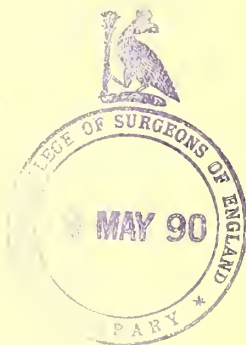
# THE FOUR COMMENCEMENTS.

## VALEDICTORY ADDRESS TO THE GRADUATES

DELIVERED AT THE CLOSE OF THE


FIFTY-THIRD SESSION OF THE MEDICAL DEPARTMENT  
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE,  
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## THE FOUR COMMENCEMENTS.

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*Gentlemen of the Graduating Class :*

In human life there are four great commencement days: when we begin to be, when we begin to learn, when we begin to practice, and when we enter the existence beyond the grave.

The origin of life baffles the biologist; no eye, or instrument, or chemical analysis unfolds it. The child knows no more of its pre-natal existence and the years nearest birth than we do of posthumous being. No genius for definitions has yet been able to make a dictionary of life origins. Ingenious terms, invented by shrewd speculators, may delude reason and beguile fancy, but no scientist has demonstrated the essence or origin of life. Darwin's origin of species rests on a plausible hypothesis. Huxley's protoplasmic clay or ooze is "such stuff as dreams are made on." Tyndall tells us that "all life is from antecedent life." Must not all these theories terminate in an "underived, self-existent, all-wise being whose name is God?" If God is matter, then we had as well say, with Pascal, "It is no matter whether at all there is any God." Science simply tells us that

our first great ancestor's name was *atom* instead of Adam. But who animated that atom? If you are to begin your professional career as materialists, regarding man as simply a final evolution of chance, a superb animal, an accident instead of the product of a forecasting design, then you had as well be veterinarians or mechanicians. It makes a vast difference, in the dignifying of your profession, whether you are to regard man's body as but a corral in which a herd of appetites and passions raven for food and lust for gratification, or as a temple in which a divine spirit witnesses itself to an immortal tenant. I assume, then, that whether a moment or a chiliad intervened the first creative and last crowning act, your body was "fearfully and wonderfully made" by a Divine Artificer, whose image it bears and whose birthright boon is immortality.

But starting with life as we trace it from the parental loins and womb, the pre-natal existence is enswathed in a mystery as profound as can be any being surviving the dissolution of the body.

What a man believes is basal to character. "As a man thinketh in his heart so is he." Ideals precede reals and fashion them. Only men of great faith can make others believe in them. The Christ-ideal dominating the Anglo-Saxon race has made its civilization. In our land the consensus of the people is that trained conscience—legislating character and controlling conduct—is the great thing to be desired and preserved.

If men are the product of heredity and environment, "the sport of circumstances," then a penal code is an iniquity. If the moral quality of an action does not reside in the intention, but in the conditioning of the animal, then punish none but those whose parentage, food, shelter, and knowledge of hygienic laws have rendered it possible for them to be and to do right. Away with ethics, and substitute anatomy and physiology. Give the human beast good conditioning, and you will make him law-abiding, industrious, thrifty, and happy. But "man does not live by bread alone." He has a hunger for "the true, the beautiful, and the good." "No pent up Utica confines his powers." The geography of earth does not bound his exploring powers. There are Stanleys of the sky.

I am not ignorant of the value of bread and beef to liberty. A sound body and a sound mind mutually complement each other. They are the hemispheres which, touching, globe a perfect manhood. But pampered nations have decayed, and no political machinery or physiological regimen have proved adequate to arrest this decadence:

"Ill fares the land to hastening ills a prey,  
Where wealth accumulates and men decay."

Reputation is a bauble dependent on the caprice of public opinion, but character is self-consciousness and goes with us. The supreme consideration in Christendom is *character*. The man who possesses

it, though penniless, is rich; though friendless, he has a great invisible constituency; though despised, he is docketed for vindication; though defeated in time, he is beaded for victory in eternity. "Time, the tomb-builder," can not sepulcher it, and it will flourish in fadeless green when worlds are wrecked. When character is lost, all is lost, save the power to retrieve it, and *that*, in part, is the thing itself.

Froude says, "all improvement is from within outward." I long to see you men high-minded men, who, "knowing nothing base, fear nothing known," to whom great thoughts and feelings shall come "like instincts unawares." You are to pass from under our watchful care to commence life in earnest, and we covet the honor of pointing to you as Cornelia to the Gracchi, and saying, "These are our jewels." You will be our crown of rejoicing or our brand of shame. Therefore we, the faculty of your *alma mater*, bid you remember that—

"Fame is what you have taken,  
Character is what you give;  
When to truth you waken,  
Then you *begin* to live."

In view of what I have said, I beg you to lend no aid to those who would excuse and prolong their vices by pleading inherited diseased appetites and passions, necessitating the use of narcotics and stimulants. Discourage such apologies, and impose a regimen and cultus to overcome morbid functional

propensities. Because "the fathers have eaten sour grapes" and set their "children's teeth on edge" is no reason why they should entail a similar evil on their offspring. The idea that hereditary taint and proclivity for evil must necessarily be perpetual is a suggestion too monstrous for a medical adviser to entertain and teach. Never allow your patient to feel that he is bound in the remorseless chains of fatalism. Put your oil into wounds instead of flames. You must be the prophet and not the executioner of hope. Hold forth the power of good habit when often repeated. Take Shakespeare's prescript:

"Refrain to-night, and that will lend  
A kind of ease to the next abstinence,  
The next more easy, for use  
Can almost change the stamp of nature  
And master e'en the Devil, or throw him out,  
With wondrous potency."

Life should be projected on eternity. We have commenced to be; how, we know not; when, we can not tell; but we are here, and so far as early consciousness is concerned we had no beginning. Every organ and sense was rudimentary while in the womb of darkness. So there may lie dormant in the body senses for which there is here no exercise or opportunity. We came here somehow, and we may be going somewhere—somewhen.

Humanity refuses to believe in annihilation. As the lamps were in the pitchers of Gideon's soldiers, and when the vessels were shattered shone forth, so



when the body is broken the soul will shine. You may shut all the senses, so that a man can not see, hear, smell, taste, or feel, and yet a self-conscious being may live in the shattered tenement. You do not expect music from a stringless harp, no matter how harmonic the soul or deft the fingers of the harpist.

Observation protests the theory that intelligence is solely dependent on organization. The greatest minds have kindled their fires in the weakest bodies, and swan-like notes have been uttered by dying men. A failure of instrumental power does not conclusively argue the annihilation of intelligent being. Cutting the wires does not prove the loss of battery energy. The deaf are made to hear by the skillful aurist; the optician can aid a failing vision; the telescope can make a desert space break out into oases of stars. One who has swooned or fallen into coma may be revived to consciousness; in sleep the vagrant brain is more active in dreaming than during the hours of waking. How rapid its action! In a moment it tours the world, and it would take a volume to record its travels; in an instant it fights a battle that it would take a folio to bulletin. What hoards of learning may be printed on the negatives of the mind by unconscious cerebration, which delirium may disclose! What treasures may be pigeon-holed in the brain to be drawn out by chance association!

One of the wonders of science is photographic astronomy. A star far beyond the space-penetrating



power of the largest telescope registers itself on the plate of the photogenic draughtsman. The acid touches it, and its exact image appears, and may be studied by the astronomer at his leisure. If these sidereal wonders can thus be brought from hidden depths by the Columbi of the sky, why may not a metropolis exist far beyond our ken, in which the Almighty has his Alhambra palace and holds invisible court, and in which angels and saints serve as obedient courtiers?

But recently the microscope opened to view worlds of highly organized life in the elements about us, heretofore unsuspected. What advances have been made in medicine by the disclosure of microbes floating in the atmosphere and swimming in the water! Now, we know the power of the Prince of the Air, and of the demons of darkness, and much of our skill is directed to the destruction of these germs, so infinitesimally small, though so tenacious of life as to defy high degrees of heat and to survive baths in deadly acids. For aught we know, the air may be tremulous with the wave of celestial plumage, vocal with divinest music, warm with immortal loves. The microphone raises the hum of the ephemera into a concert of symphonies, and the foot-fall of a fly into a tread as loud as the thundering hoof. The time may come when "the music of the spheres," now credited to fable, may become a recognized harmony, so that we may hear the wheel-work of the universe spinning to the measures of a mighty march. And

so death may open vision to spectacles sublimer than any scenery eye hath scanned, and open ears to harmonies sweeter than earth's orchestras, and bring to hearts joys transcending the dreams of poetry. It is possible that death may be enfranchising instead of obliiviating:

"The soul's dark cottage, battered and decayed,  
Lets in new light through chinks that time hath made;  
Stronger by weakness, wiser men become  
As they draw nearer their eternal home."

The chemist's retort, the surgeon's scalpel, and the biologist's microscope are not agencies for soul-hunting.

"The doctrine of an immortal spirit will never come from the dissecting-room or the laboratory unless it is first carried thither from a higher sphere. Yet there is nothing in these workshops which can efface it, any more than their gases and exhalations can blot out the stars of heaven." If the body is ever shifting and substituting the particles that compose it, so that every molecule is replaced in periods of five to seven years, memory can not be located in matter; for, if it were, we would be continually sliding away from ourselves, and we would lose our identity. In the waste of your patients under imperfect nutrition and febrile combustion you will not see, *pari passu*, a loss of recollection. You will not find intelligence co-related to bulk and fats. It may be that emancipated spirits care as little for the cumbering clog of clay committed to the grave as a

lobster for its cast-off shell or a butterfly for its abandoned cocoon. Men have remained for weeks in a state of suspended animation, showing no token of life save the absence of decomposition. "Whether in or out of the body, they could not tell" when the trance was broken. In your practice you will see life retreat beyond your ken, and yet return. Could we generalize the facts a step beyond this line of observation we might be compelled to concede that all the dead are as really unclothed of flesh and independent of senses and organs as were these phenomenal cases.

If you accept the evolution theory, death may be but another link in that chain through which the angelic is developed from the human. In a higher sense than the poet thought we find it true that

"There is no Death! What seems so is transition;  
This life of mortal breath  
Is but a suburb of the life elysian,  
Whose portal we call Death."

Entered on that terrace of being, we shall realize what the Great Physician meant when he said, "If a man keep my sayings he shall never see death."

I have talked to you thus, because I would see you more than anatomists, scrutinizing bones, muscles, and nerves; more than physiologists, studying cells and secretions; more than chemists, analyzing the tissues of which the body is composed. If you discern in man nothing more than the animal, you had as well practice on horses and companion jockeys and stable boys. The ideas with which you commence

life will formulate the character you are to make in a profession which lowers its crest only to those who bear a divine commission and who stand in holy places. By reason of your calling and training you are to become moral and social factors in the communities in which you are to live. You are not to be whirled about by a revolving wheel, but you are to lay your hand upon its axle and give it direction and velocity. You are to mold the minds of men as well as make their bodies whole. You will belittle yourself if, adopting the trade of pedantry, you peddle the small wares of animalism and practice the vulgar arts of the Faith-killer and Heart-crusher. By recognizing the majesty of mind, and by seeking to give trend to faith, love, and hope, your presence in the sick-chamber will be something more than that of a dispenser of drugs and a discerner of pulse and temperature. I want to see you men with broad-sided natures turned sunward, standing by your patient's bedside invoking divine direction to diagnosis and prescription. Act upon the rule of the Grecian poet,

"I seek what's to be sought—  
I learn what's to be taught—  
I beg the rest of Heaven."

You will have the opportunity of studying psychology, the interplay of the soul and its instrument. It is yours to harmonize the two. Health is the perfect equilibrium between our organism, with all its constituent parts, and the exterior world. Organic

disturbance compels us to institute a new and more spiritual balance, to withdraw within the soul. The body is no more *we*, although it may belong to us. It is nothing more than the yacht in which we make the voyage of life, a boat whose weakness we study, whose structure we scrutinize without confounding it with our personality, which is to survive the wreck. You will see that if you diagnose correctly you will have to individualize your treatment that it may quadrate with personal idiosyncrasy. You can not classify your patients, mechanically, under some department of nosology, for every one is a special and unique case. A physician should covet a clairvoyant faculty to read an invalid through and thoroughly, that he may grasp the unity of the individual who has put his treatment under his care.

You will commence practice "the heir of all the ages." The wisdom of the Past flings its treasures at your feet. The aggregate of inventive skill is yours. Scores of instruments helpful to diagnosis, to topical treatment, to the exploration of cavities, to heroic and mechanical surgery, to obstetric and gynecological operations, to subcutaneous treatment, to microscopic investigation, to chemical analysis, are yours, that were unknown to the Fathers of your Art. Medical statistics, the product of a large observation and many experiments, furnish you with data that will enable you to reach judgments with almost mathematical precision.

Mental and comparative physiology are new but

revealing branches of medical science. The vegetable and mineral worlds have emptied their hidden virtues on the altar of science, and specifics and anæsthetics of marked value and of pain-killing merit will make your practice a luxury as compared with that of your sires, who were compelled to see their patients sink under pitiless disease without ability to prescribe a remedy to arrest decline, or an anodyne to soothe suffering, and who were forced to see the victims of their rude surgery writhe in their smoking blood, and twist under lacerated nerves, without an anæsthetic to abate or conquer their pains.

You will enter upon a learned profession. You are to grapple with skill and prove yourself a worthy competitor. Your welcome to medical ranks may not be hearty, but do not despair. No man is, finally, likely to have so many friends as the man who has shown his capacity to do without any. Disdain no service in which you can heal, help, or learn. One of the greatest surgeons of modern times took his start from answering the call of a duchess to set the broken leg of her dog, which the family practitioner declined to do. Now mere creature-ward kindness should prompt the relief of suffering even in a brute:

"He prayeth best who loveth best  
Both man and bird and beast."

The great are never so great as when they stoop to help and heal the dependent and diseased. The homeless exile and mendicant, the leprous pauper, the



scrofulous lazzaroni, the shameless courtesan, the condemned murderer, the deformed freak, the domestic pet, the faithful beast of burden, the ungrateful patient and miserly patron may have claims upon your healing skill which no professional pride can set aside. If vivisection be defensible on the ground that a common pathology belongs to animated nature, and the effects of drugs on rabbits, guinea-pigs, and dogs are inferred to be co-pathic with their effects on men, why may not the same skill that hurts the lower to heal the higher animal employ itself in emergency to mitigate or cure the maladies of brutes? One need not be "a brute of a Doctor" because he doctors Brutes.

You must not forget that all professions entail condescensions. The lawyer must defend the peniless and friendless felon, though his guilt be placarded on his person; the clergyman must trail his robes through slums of sin, and though his lawn be soiled he remains as stainless as if promenading the golden avenues of the Celestial City. So the physician, without fee, gratitude, or fame, must give time and talent, and often medicines, and, counting not his own life dear, thread the breeding holes of pestilence with no antiseptic protection. No dungeon is too dark, no disease too loathsome or too infectious, no air too foul, no lazaretto too filthy, no dive too damned to quarantine philanthropy. And these offices are the more sublime because performed in silence and secrecy. You will breathe



feculent airs and mephitic gases, encounter forbidding spectacles, become the custodian of disgusting secrets, mark the ravages of wantonness, hold your peace when censured, be bold when fronted by frowning ignorance, shameless superstition, and blushless empiricism. Your patience will be tried, your fortitude tested, your courage challenged, your motives impeached, your pride wounded, and oftentimes you will find yourself unrequited either by the gold or gratitude of those whom you have sacrificially served. You will, if you would toughen your manhood, "suffer and be strong." You will have need of tact to ward off the curiosity of the anxious and to preserve "truth in the inward parts" while compelled to the semblance of dissimulation in order to forestall fright and allay a fear that, encouraged, would prove fatal.

If business does not come at once, on commencing to practice, devote yourself to reading, and use every opportunity to do something professional, whether paid for it or not. See every operation, autopsy, and pathological specimen you can. Study botany in the fields, chemistry in the laboratory, and look into the invisible with your microscope. If seen thus engaged the people will credit you with seriousness in your profession, and your employment, without patients, will be your best advertisement, and it will bring you patronage. The route to preferment does not lie through the *salons* of society, the village sports, and is far away from the drink-shop. By complacency in

yielding to the social and sportive, you will get the name of "Good Fellow," but when life is trembling in the parted scales, sobriety and skill are at a premium. You must "learn to labor and to wait." But, while waiting, work for knowledge and watch for opportunity. Win by application; woo by merit. "There is room at the top," though the profession be crowded. Be able to do something better than those around you, and the call to do it is certain. You must keep up with the times. Things are moving, and you must move with them or be run over. Sit with folded hands, bemoaning the times, "waiting for something to turn up," and you will become atrophied and calcined; the rust of despondency will eat into your heart, and you will either turn aside, bribed by the promises of success, into some other pursuit, or lie down and die in despair. "This life of ours is like the deep sea-water, when with bold exertion we may swim securely on the surface, but to rest is to sink and drown." The power to endure is, perhaps, the crowning virtue of manhood. Only a few can wait long; believe when nothing is to be seen; hope when delay sickens the heart, and, "like the sturdy oak, add a new and wider ring to their mental growth with every year that creeps torpidly by them."

The fruits long ripening through your growing spring and lusty summer will fall into your lap, and your autumn will be golden with the fulfilment of promises that were tardy in coming, and a protracted Indian summer of success and honor will verge far

into the edge of winter, and when you go to "your long home" the "mourners will go about the streets," and your good name will be as "ointment poured forth," a legacy to the profession, and a decoration to those who wear it proudly.

You are to enter a profession keyed so high—because alleviating of suffering, conserving of life, postponing of death—that no greed of gain will permit you to enrich yourself by the knowledge you may discover. Your triumphs are to add to the common stock of the world's wisdom. Nothing you may learn can be kept secret as the capital of a specialist, or patented to revenue cupidity. Whatever diminishes suffering, repairs organ or limb or sense, or prolongs life, is the rightful property of the profession. You would be as worthily employed in attempting to corner the sunshine, or to corral the air, as in essaying to monopolize a discovered specific or turn it into a commercial trust.

But on this account you are not required to make a common ware of your knowledge, or yield to the inquisition of the prurient, nor to be victimized by the artful effort to get your opinion and prescription without credit or fee. Do not make your cases public property. Let your works praise you "within the gates."

Thus commencing and continuing, you will come to your last end, as I trust, full of years and honors. And when you commence the immortal life a grand and goodly company will welcome you to their com-

panionship, while that approbation which is of more worth than all worldly wreaths and words will gladden your ear and swell with eternal bliss your soul—  
“Well done, thou good and faithful servant.”

But I may not keep you longer with words. We must part. Soon the rushing train will wheel you to the scene of your labors. I could not, if I would, speak the blessing your instructors would bequeath had they the power to bestow it. Living, we will cherish pleasant memories of our interviews; dying, we will hope to meet you at your coming in the mighty parliament of the happy Immortals.

Go, then, to hail and honor a calling that awaits you, clothed with the insignia of Nobility. Panting, as you are, to practice its philanthropies and reap its rich awards, I pray you may be spared disappointment, and that you may realize that radiant future of your youthful dreams. Go, strong with courage, tranquilized by confidence, fortified for assault, invulnerable to defeat, and winged with hope. Pain cries for your help from its rack; disease summons you from its couch of distress; death entreats you to soften its pillow; posterity beckons you to hand it to its cradle gently.

“Farewell! a word that must be, and hath been—  
A sound which makes us linger;—yet, *farewell!*”

